

The Relationship between Leaders at Church of the Open Door, York PA

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In this paper we seek to define and to clarify the roles and relationship of “Pastors” and “Elders” as leaders, both as they play themselves out in Scripture and also how we understand them in the context of COD.

THE REASON FOR THE PAPER: A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

The Church of the Open Door has been governed by a Council of Elders since its inception in the early 1950’s. For many years in the life of the church, the Elders led the church and the Pastors did the work of the ministry. Many, if not most, members of the church viewed the Elders as the governing body of COD making most of the decisions related not only to spiritual issues but also to operational issues; the Pastors, meanwhile, were viewed as subject to the Council and under the authority and management of the Elders.

In 2005, in the aftermath of a difficult situation involving the Senior Pastor, the Council decided to spend some time studying the Scriptures to reconsider and better understand the biblical role of Elder. Since that time, the Council has, at various times, revisited the question; but while they have considered the question, they did not draw any final conclusions, and thus they did not document their findings.

One of the reasons for this is that, as the church (in the years following) began to experience significant and rapid growth, the roles and responsibilities of the Elders and the Pastors began to shift. The resulting dynamic has been that, functionally, the Elders now bear responsibility for the ultimate direction of the church, while entrusting, enabling and empowering the Pastors to make many decisions in the life of the church – decisions that had historically been made by the Elders -- with the support and authority of the Elders.

The leadership team has now, once again, spent the last year or so studying and evaluating the Scriptures and its teaching on the roles and responsibilities of Pastors and Elders, and this paper seeks to document what we have discussed and the conclusions we have drawn, with the goal of promoting and

strengthening the unity among the leadership and throughout the church. After all, in John 17:21, Jesus Himself prays that we “may be one,...so that the world may believe” that God has sent Jesus to save the world.

OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS FROM SCRIPTURE

As we have studied the Scriptures, what follows are observations and conclusions we have drawn regarding the roles and responsibility of Pastors and Elders in the 1st-century church:

- I. **In Ephesians 4:11-15, and the books of Acts, 1 & 2 Timothy, and Titus, we learn that there are those in the church with the responsibility and role to lead the church as “Elders” and “Deacons”, and others who are given the gift and role of “Pastors”.**

Throughout Paul’s writings, we see that, from an organizational standpoint, certain individuals are designated as “Elders” or “Deacons” within the local church, while other individuals are designated as “Pastors” (See I Tim. 3:1; I Tim. 3:6; Eph. 4:11). At the same time, while the roles of Elders and Pastors may in some ways be distinct, what also seems to be clear from Scripture is that, in their responsibilities, Pastors and Elders share responsibility; that is to say, Pastors are Elders, and Elders are Pastors. This is evident, for example, in the Scriptures call both the Pastors and Elders to shepherd the flock (Acts 20:28, I Peter 5:1-4, Eph. 4:11-12). Thus, Pastors and Elders should see each other as fellow-laborers in God’s field, on the same team serving together to shepherd the congregation over which they have joint responsibility. Unfortunately, this has not always been the case in the history of COD, and the result has been tensions and, at times, highly-strained relationship between members of the pastoral staff and members of the Council of Elders.

- II. **In 1 Timothy 5:17 the Apostle Paul writes, “The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.”**

This is a seminal passage with such an amazingly succinct description of New Testament church leadership. It teaches us that in the church there is:

- A Single group of elders and leaders.

- A responsibility of all elders for “directing,” which means “to lead and oversee.”
- An additional responsibility for some of them, in addition to directing, to engage in the “work [of] teaching and preaching.”

So, it seems that in the early church, (a) all of the elders were “**Directing Elders**” and (b) some of the elders were “**Preaching/Teaching Elders**”. Thus, all elders directed, led and oversaw, while the “**Preaching/Teaching Elders**” added “preaching and teaching” to their responsibilities. In 21st-century church culture, the “**Preaching/Teaching Elders**” are often vocational church employees (generally designated as “**pastors**”) who are educated, set apart and paid to do the work of directing and preaching, and thus receive the “double honor” Paul wrote about in 1 Tim. 5:17. At the same time, however, here at COD we have a number of lay elders who are also especially gifted as teachers and preachers, and they are certainly included in this designation as “**Preaching/Teaching Elders**”. What also seems to be included in this verse is a “**first among equals**” mentality. All the elders are equal in office and responsibility and are to receive “honor”.

But those whose work is “preaching and teaching” seem to have “**double honor.**” What does that mean? Reading further in the context in verse 22, it seems to be referring to monetary pay. But going back to verse 17 it also refers to respect. So, some elders, by virtue of their giftedness and calling, rise above as “first among equals”, and often are the leaders of the elders.

III. Some examples from the early church teach us about how this worked itself out in church life:

We see this especially in the book of Acts as leadership is being formed.

A. Peter

- Acts 2:14: “Then **Peter** stood up with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd...”
- Acts 4:8: “Then **Peter**, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them...”

Here **Peter** is the one, on these momentous occasions, who is chosen by God and the other leaders to speak and address the multitudes. He is clearly a “**first among equals**” in 1st century church life.

B. James

- Acts 12:17b: “...tell James and the brothers about this.”

In this passage, Paul is speaking of his miraculous release from prison. As he instructs regarding the telling of his release, he wants the leaders told first, and especially mentions James, who was clearly the leader of the 1st century Jerusalem church. And so, as with Peter above, **James** here is a great example of the “**first among equals**” concept.

- Acts 15:13: “When they finished, James spoke up: ‘Brothers, listen to me.’”

This is the response of the famous Jerusalem Council to the questions of the gospel and legalism. Here when the Council reports its findings, **James** is the spokesman.

- Acts 21: 18: “The next day Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all the elders were present.”

This is when Paul arrived back in Jerusalem after his first missionary journey. Who does he want to see? **James**...and all the elders. This seems to be a good example of a “first among equals” picture.

C. John (as well as Peter and James)

It is also observed in Galatians 2:9 that Paul recognizes **James, Cephas, and John** to be “pillars” of the early Church. These “pillars” were leaders among leaders, being the ‘first among equals’ and having ‘double honor’ granted to them from other leaders.

D. Conclusions

So, from this we learn that from the earliest days in the church...

- There were leaders, and there were a few key leaders.
- At first the key leaders were Peter, John, and James.
- Peter and James also seemed to be the public spokesmen.
- James's responsibility seems to have been to facilitate the Elder Council functioning in Jerusalem.
- He was a kind of "Council moderator" or "chair".
- These three leaders seem to be the "first among equals" leading the rest of the Jerusalem elders.

IV. One of the jobs of the "key leaders" or "first among equals" was to bring vision and direction from God, to the Council, and then to the church.

In the book of Acts, we also see how God used Peter – one of the key leaders of the early church – to bring vision to the church leadership and eventually to the church. In Acts 10: 9-16, God reveals Himself to Peter by means of a sheet coming down from heaven, full of animals, as a means to give Peter an understanding that nothing is "unclean." God uses this, by way of metaphor, to give the church the vision to accept not only Jews but also Gentiles into the church. But notice the process by which God effectuated this:

- Here God seemed to reveal vision/direction to a designated leader in the person of Peter, who we have already established above as a "Preaching/Teaching Elder."
- Peter, however, did not feel empowered by God to dictate the church's vision; instead, in Acts 11, he presented the vision/direction he received to church leaders for acknowledgment and approval.
- This seems to demonstrate that he too was a "first among equals" – namely, he had uniquely received the vision, but others had the authority to confirm and speak into the vision and direction he had received.
- In Acts 11 Peter then explains the vision and its meaning to the Council at Jerusalem.
- The Council listens to the vision and then responds -- "When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, 'So then God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life.'" Acts 11:18

- The Council embraced the vision Peter and key leaders presented to them.
- Interesting observation: As God chose to reveal His vision for the church, here He did it through individuals, then to key leaders, and then to the Council, who approved it for the entire church.

APPLICATIONS TO THE CHURCH – AND COD – TODAY

I. So, if this is how God seemed to shape and direct leadership in the 1st-century church, how do these principles – both of the relationship between Pastor and Elder, and also of vision-casting – transfer to the church in the 21st century?

The questions that arise from this biblical understanding of church leadership in the 1st century help to shape leadership in the 21st-century church as well:

- What are the roles and responsibilities of an Elder, or of the “Directing Elders”, on the church Council?
- What are the roles and responsibilities of the Elders who are key leaders (the “Preaching/Teaching Elders,” or the firsts among equals)?
- How does the church find its vision and direction today?

A. What are the roles and responsibilities of an Elder (in this paper called a “Directing Elder”)?

1. To Model godly character. In 1 Tim. 3:1-7, Tit. 1:5-9 we find the character qualities of a Biblical elder:

- Integrity, 1 Tim. 3:2
- One woman man in character, 1 Tim. 3:2
- Self-control 1 Tim. 3:2
- Hospitable, 1 Tim. 3:2
- Not a heavy drinker, 1 Tim. 3:3
- Not given to anger, 1 Tim. 3:3
- Not combative, 1 Tim. 3:3
- Gentle, 1 Tim. 3:3
- Free from love of money, 1 Tim. 3:3

- Manages house well, 1 Tim. 3:4
- Fair and impartial, Titus 1:8
- Not arrogant, Titus 1:7
- Disciplined life of holiness, Titus 1:8
- Meets the spiritual/ministry qualifications found in 1 Tim. 1 and Titus 1
- Serious about spiritual matters, 1 Tim. 3:2, Tit. 1:8
- Loves the Lord, Titus 1:8
- Appropriate ministry involvement, 1 Tim. 3:1, 1 Tim. 3:10
- Be examples to the flock as hard-working, eager servants of Christ, 1 Tim. 5:12, 1 Pet.5:1-5

2. To Teach

- Able to communicate God's Word and refute false doctrine, 1 Tim. 3:2, Titus 1:8
- Communicate God's truth, 1 Tim. 4:6,11-12; 6:1-2,17; 2 Tim. 1:6-7; 2:24; 4:2
- Handle stewardship of Spiritual truth, Titus 1:7

3. To Lead

- Not a new believer, has had time to mature and serve, 1 Tim. 3:6
- Shepherd God's people, 1 Peter 5:2
- Lead God's flock, 1 Tim.5:17, Acts 20:28
- Seek God's vision/direction
- Shepherd and watch the flock, Acts 20:28-31; Heb. 13:17
- Resolve disputes in church, Acts 15
- Assessing church health
- Helping to cast vision
- Concentrating on "big picture" issues
- Determining theological/practical church positions
- Establishing major policies
- Approving pastoral and staff positions
- Hiring associate Pastors
- Coaching the Senior Pastor

- “Approving” (not necessarily generating) church’s direction/vision or strategic plan

4.To Pray

- Speak the Word and pray for people, Acts 6:15
- Minister to sick and shut-in, James 5:14

B. What are the roles and responsibilities of the of the Elders who are key leaders (in this paper called the “Preaching/Teaching Elders”)?)

Understanding the “first among equals” and “double honor” dynamics, COD leadership has instituted a Central Leadership Team (CLT). This CLT is comprised of key leaders, which include: (1) the Senior Pastor, (2) the Lay-President of the Council, and (3) others that leadership would recognize as helpful in strengthening the CLT to accomplish its function of leading the leadership.

In addition to the roles of “Directing Elder” listed above, we believe the role of the CLT members, as “Preaching/Teaching Elders,” also includes:

- 1) Preach/teach, lead, and shepherd the flock
- 2) Uncover and cast the church’s vision/direction
- 3) Lead, coach and evaluate the staff (paid or volunteer)
- 4) Outline theological/practical church positions
- 5) Participate as a full member on the Board in accordance with the terms of the church Constitution and By-laws
- 6) Solve tomorrow’s problems with wisdom and the assistance of others
- 7) Recommend staffing personnel to the elders
- 8) Oversee the “day-to-day” issues of church life
- 9) Develop the agenda for the elder meeting

C. How does the church find its vision and direction today?

So this leaves us with the question for our church leadership to ponder: How does a church today go about finding vision and direction? This is a great question for churches to ponder, because a local church congregation often has many competing visions and directions in a local church, and often it becomes a

source of conflict. Here are some thoughts and a process to offer to the discussion:

1. Often God gives His vision to individuals in the OT and NT (although not exclusively) after they have an encounter with Him. He did this with Moses, Joshua, David, many of the Prophets, and in the book of Acts – especially with Peter and Paul. Today, the CLT would seek it through prayer, Bible study, analyzing church DNA, engaging with others in the church, and analyzing what God has been doing and where He’s working. The pastoral staff and the Council also plan specific times of “retreat” – opportunities to spend extended time together, to encounter God away from the distractions of life and ministry, and to seek His direction for vision and guidance.
2. The individuals who receive direction from God then come to the Elder Council as a body.
3. Council considers whether this is from God and, if Council confirms that it is from God, works to further refine and embrace the vision.
4. The pastors and elders then communicate the vision to other ministry leaders, and then to the congregation at large, for their consideration and affirmation.

II. Addendum – Alignment

A. Why is “alignment” important among the Elders and Pastors?

The practical outworking of these verses seems to suggest that the Preaching/ Teaching Elders and the Directing Elders (including all Pastors who are not Preaching and Teaching Elders) must all have a good working relationship. Their intent should not be to “manage each other” or to view the relationship as one where the members of the Elder Council “manage” or “oversee” the Pastors in a way that manifests a lack of trust. While it is true that Pastors may ultimately be accountable to the Elder Council, it is also true that the Elder Council should be accountable to the Pastors – what is clear from Scripture that they are to work and lead **together**.

Leadership working and leading together is the necessary outcome of following Christ, who is the Head of the Church. The purpose of Christ’s Headship is to

ensure the production of spiritual fruit within the Church (Col 2:16-19). Believing that Christ is the Head over COD and that Christ is always leading and directing COD for the purpose of bearing spiritual fruit, it is essential for leadership to align to the direction given by Christ.

This is why “alignment” is so important as Pastors and Elders serve together. We recognize that Paul does not give this as one of the qualifications in 1 or 2 Timothy or Titus, but we do find it in various places in the New Testament, as leaders worked together:

1. The first is in **Acts 15** where the church had the first Council to decide on the contentious issue of legalism. Undoubtedly theological overtones were a part of this council, alignment overtones also colored the discussion. One of the goals of this council was for church leaders and everyone else to be on the same page, theologically and practically. Thus, when the council wrote the letter at the end of the narrative, in Acts 15:23-31, outlining their conclusions to the local church leaders and people in other places, **they mentioned a number of practical areas where everyone needed to be on the same page (or needed to be in alignment)**, such as eating of certain foods, and morality.
2. Another area of leader alignment is found in **Philippians 2**, where the Apostle Paul is describing the relationship he had with both Timothy and Epaphroditus. As Paul explains, he and these men were “fellow workers and fellow soldiers”. The phrase means that Paul and Epaphroditus were lock step in alignment with each other, marching in the same direction, and on the same page. When you are a “fellow soldier” you have to make sure you are shooting and marching in the same direction.
3. The split that Paul and Barnabas had in **Acts 15:36-41** is also very instructive to us. What was that split about? Was it over a character issue? Was it a doctrinal disagreement? It was none of the those. It was over ministry philosophy and alignment, namely how should they handle a fellow servant named Mark who needed to grow up? The text says “the disagreement was so sharp” that Paul and Barnabas parted company. This was a situation that probably could have been avoided had they taken the time to discuss and articulate their ministry

philosophy. But be that as it may, it was ministry alignment that caused them to part company.

4. The importance of leader alignment is in full view when COD, or any other local church, finds itself looking to **hiring a pastor**. One of the many things that are discussed both privately and publicly is ministry philosophy and alignment. Churches work hard to make sure that the ministry philosophy of a prospective pastor is aligned with the ministry philosophy that Christ has developed within that church. Churches take a great deal of time to ensure this, and when a potential candidate comes to a local church, the congregation is given plenty of opportunity to question a potential candidate in public forums about many things, including ministry philosophy and alignment. In fact, we might be able to make a good argument that most of the questions a potential pastoral candidate will get will be in the area of ministry/leader alignment. So...if a church goes to that much work to make sure their vocational pastors are aligned with doctrine, ministry philosophy and direction, we believe it is imperative that they do the same with those directing and teaching elders who sit on the board.

B. What are some examples of “theological/practical positions” mentioned in the elder qualifications, that elders must think through and consider regarding alignment?

- The church’s response to “emergent theology” and ministry to young adults
- How do we respond to the growing issue of divorce? What’s our position on divorce/remarriage?
- What is our church position regarding undocumented immigrants?
- How should our church seek to more intensely engage the community?
- What should we be doing about racial/ethnic reconciliation?
- Where do we stand on gay marriage, transgender issues?
- How should we engage our flock and give counsel on doctrinal error issues?

CONCLUSION

We the Elders and Pastors of COD, offer this document in deep humility, understanding that no one has a corner on the Truth. As we have studied these Scriptures, prayed for God's guidance, and discussed them with each other, we have shaped this document and desire to use it as a source of wisdom and direction regarding not only how the current leadership will seek to lead COD, but how God will continue to lead our church in the years to come. At the same time, as God gives us or future leaders new insights, the church leadership will revisit this document in the years ahead.